

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson
Conference Committee Meeting on H.R. 4348
May 8, 2012

Thank you, Chairman Boxer and Chairman Mica, for calling this meeting and for your leadership in this effort to reauthorize the Nation's surface transportation programs. I look forward to working with both of you and the rest of our colleagues on this conference committee to put together a bill that will get more Americans back to work and help to literally build up our struggling economy.

Despite the budgetary situation we find ourselves in, it is not the time to delay investments in our transportation infrastructure. Such a delay will only further burden our economy.

In fact, the poor condition of our highways, bridges, and transit systems is already expected to cost American households and businesses more than \$900 billion dollars by 2020. The truth is that we simply cannot afford to fail to get a reauthorization bill over the finish line.

The Dallas-Fort Worth Region, which I represent, is one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country. Last year, the average Dallas commuter spent 45 hours stuck in traffic, wasting 22 gallons of fuel and an estimated \$924 dollars. Dallas's truck congestion is the sixth worst in the nation, costing the trucking industry over \$600 million in 2010.

The region's explosive growth requires an expansion in infrastructure and transit services, but over a third of Texas's transportation budget is dedicated to just maintaining and replacing the State's existing roads and bridges.

Unfortunately, the transportation challenges being faced by the Dallas region are not uncommon. We can, and should, do more to improve our transportation infrastructure.

As the Ranking Member of the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in the House, I recognize that the long-term viability of our transportation system is largely dependent on quality research and the development of new transportation technologies and materials that will make our transportation infrastructure safer, stronger, and more sustainable.

Because of that, one of my priorities is to ensure that the Department of Transportation's research and development programs have the resources they need. I also want to make sure that the Department's research programs are effective, well-coordinated, and prioritized.

We cannot deny that our current transportation system places an enormous burden on the environment. We need to be doing more to minimize the impact of surface transportation on the environment and public health. And, to do this, we need to be investing resources in cutting-edge research that will lead to environmentally-sustainable infrastructure and construction technologies. We can have both a vibrant transportation sector and a healthy environment. A robust environmental research program at the Department of Transportation will help us get there.

Additionally, in a time when our transportation system is challenged by aging infrastructure, declining revenues, and increased usage, access to reliable, comprehensive transportation data is more important than ever. I want to ensure that Federal, State, and local transportation officials have the data that they need to effectively and efficiently prioritize their policy and investment decisions.

Finally, I want to conclude by commenting on the Gulf Coast Restoration provisions under consideration in the conference. Whether or not you live or represent the coastal communities of Texas, Alabama, Louisiana, or Florida, the Gulf of Mexico provides a wealth of products and services to the nation.

It is important that this bill provides the framework and guidance necessary to allow us to begin to really understand and, more importantly, mitigate the impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on this unique ecosystem and our economy.

It is my hope that we can work in a bipartisan, bicameral manner on a bill that will provide our state DOTs, rail, and transit authorities with the stability they need to plan long-term projects. There are no Democratic or Republican bridges. There are no Democratic or Republican roads. This bill is far too important to the American people and our economy for us not to come together and send a bill to the President's desk.